

Rooftop Construction Subcommittee

Draft Resolution

Members: Rick Fifield (Chairman), Nick Musso, Meg Lousteau, Mark Aguilar, Robert Kenny, Betty Norris, Denise Estopinal, John Williams, Renee Bourgogne, Bryan Block

This committee was formed to define and draft guidelines for the regulation of **activated, open-air rooftop conditions** within the Vieux Carré, something that, heretofore, has not been addressed by the VCC Design Guidelines. This will assist developers when determining which buildings could appropriately be considered for this type of addition. The goal is to establish transparent and predictable standards and processes to ensure quality design in proposals.

There is a recent trend towards commercial activation of rooftops within the Vieux Carré. This affects both proposed new construction, as well as proposals to modify historic buildings with terraces and penthouses in order to capture access to the currently prized “rooftop experience”.

Although the current VCC design guidelines effectively define rooftop *additions* to existing buildings, they are inadequate with regards to unconditioned, activated rooftops or terraces. It is our goal that guidelines be as prescriptive as possible so that all proposed new construction, modifications or rooftop additions are appropriate to the *tout ensemble* while ensuring that applicants, once again, find the VCC review process to be transparent and predictable.

Although the appeal of such activated rooftop space is understandable, this is a dramatic departure from the usage of the historic roofscape of the French Quarter. There is little to no historical precedent within the Vieux Carré for the commercial roof terraces being proposed today for use as auxiliary recreational spaces on top of large-scale adaptive reuse conversions of warehouses and other types of commercial buildings, as well as on proposed new construction. The ad hoc use of existing roofs as occupied space is also not appropriate and should expressly not be permitted.

Review should include not only the proposed physical rooftop construction, but also how its presence would affect the *tout ensemble* (CCNO 166-151) of the District (i.e. potential view-sheds that are blocked or radically altered). It is important to remember the charge of the VCC as expressed in the Louisiana State Constitution where the commission was authorized to preserve the buildings of the Vieux Carré

“...for the benefit of the people of the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana.” This was declared to have a “public purpose” and continued that the “quaint and distinctive character of the Vieux Carré section of the City...may not be injuriously affected, and in order that the value to the community of those buildings having architectural and historical worth may not be impaired, and in order that a reasonable degree of control may be exercised over the architecture of private and semi-public buildings erected on or abutting the public streets of said Vieux Carré section”.

The VCC Design Guidelines, ratified by New Orleans City Council on August 6, 2015, states:

*“In its regulation of the Vieux Carré, the VCC’s jurisdiction is limited to proposed exterior changes to a property including the rooftop, interior of a courtyard, alleyway and/or carriageway. **However, to preserve the tout ensemble, the Commission has the responsibility to comment on, or raise concern regarding, any issue not specifically under its regulatory authority that has the potential to jeopardize the built environment.**” (VCCDG 01-03)*

This jurisdiction includes elements that are not visible from the public right-of-way such as rooftops, both existing and proposed new construction.

PROPOSED REVISIONS TO VCC DESIGN GUIDELINES

Currently, the design guidelines define a **roof top addition** as any new construction on top of an existing rooftop for occupied or unoccupied space, and includes a full-floor addition. This definition should be revised to include ***“occupied, finished space designed to accommodate outdoor commercial or residential living space including, but not limited to, furniture, landscaping, lighting, etc., all of which must be reviewed and approved by VCC unless not visible from any public or private space.”***

Roof deck should be defined as, generally, a platform built above the roof structure, capable of supporting weight, similar to a floor and connected to the main building by stairs and possibly an elevator. It is typically enclosed by a railing or parapet for safety.

Based on research of how other similar historic districts have regulated this condition, we also propose that **food must be served in such activated, open-air rooftop additions, not just alcohol, and no rooftop space can be occupied after 10:00 pm. Noise must not exceed prescribed decibel levels, reading to be taken at 5’ above deck. No amplified music nor speakers shall be allowed.**

For properties located adjacent to residential areas, approved screens, walls, shutters, or other devices shall be required to restrict visual access to the residential units.

Illumination of the activated, open-air rooftop addition shall be restricted to avoid lights that focus outward or upward and should limit spillage of light from the deck.

ROOFTOP ADDITIONS

THE VCC REQUIRES:

- Compliance with the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) – A rooftop addition shall not require a variance for height limit or floor area ratios
- Review of all exterior items located on a roof surface including paving, railings and built-in furnishings

THE VCC DOES NOT RECOMMEND:

- A rooftop addition on a Green, Pink or Yellow rated building
- A rooftop addition on a building of less than three full stories in height

THE VCC DOES NOT ALLOW:

- A rooftop addition on a Purple or Blue rated building
- A rooftop addition on a building originally constructed as a residential building
- A rooftop addition on a roof with a pitch greater than 3-inches vertically in 12-inches horizontally and an existing parapet less than 18-inches in height – Except at a camelback shotgun
- A roof addition greater than one story and/or 12’-0” in height or with a roof form other than a flat or low-sloped roof – Excluding an elevator override

Guidelines should explicitly indicate that rooftop decks that are highly visible are strongly discouraged. Such additions to historic buildings shall be located to the rear of the structure or the most inconspicuous side of the building. Additions to roofs shall not be visible from the front elevation.

To be added to VCC Design Guidelines 14:17 Design Standards for Rooftop Addition Review (at left):

- Activated, open-air rooftop additions shall comply with all Rooftop Addition requirements and recommendations shown on VCC Design Guidelines.
- No activated, open-air rooftop addition shall be allowed such that accessory structures (stair, elevator, etc.) would exceed the 50’-0” max. height allowable as per the CZO.

Current VCC Design Guidelines

Although the VCC does not regulate *use*, the following are accessories to *use* that are regulated:

- Lighting
- Furniture
- Vegetation
- Speakers
- Visibility
- Architectural compatibility of the proposed addition with existing building should not be intrusive or a deterrent to the architecture of the existing buildings or surrounding VC historic district streetscape
- Changes to design guidelines must be ratified by VCC then approved by City Council
- define rooftop “decks” within the rooftop addition guidelines, and include elements that are associated with rooftop activation:
 - Use
 - Noise
 - Lighting
 - Accessory furniture
 - Elevator over-rides and stair housing
- criteria of what are issues for rooftop activation which challenge the *tout ensemble*:
 - Visibility of the space
 - Privacy that is compromised
 - Impact on historic roofscape
 - Noise/acoustics
 - Light/lighting
 - Furniture
 - Vegetation
 - Modification to existing building envelope
 - Stairs
 - Elevator override
 - Adjustments to the guidelines can perhaps be accommodated by the simple addition of some language to overcome the fact that such activated rooftop “experiences” were not historically an issue.

ROOFTOP ADDITIONS

As most buildings in the Vieux Carré were built at or close to their property lines, it is often not possible to expand a building's footprint. As a result, some property owners hope to add new space on top of an existing building. The two types of additions on top of an existing building are a camelback and a rooftop addition.

- **Camelback:** The camelback is a traditional addition design for a wood frame shotgun or shotgun double (Refer to *Shotgun, Guidelines for Architectural Building Types & Architectural Styles*, page 02-8) – A traditionally designed camelback proposed for a wood-framed shotgun building is not subject to the more rigorous submittal requirements for a rooftop addition; however, it must be compatible with the existing building (Refer to *Principles for Additions*, page 14-11)
- **Rooftop Addition:** A rooftop addition is defined as any new construction on top of an existing rooftop for occupied or unoccupied space, and includes a full-floor addition

A rooftop addition is a way to increase the square footage and floor area ratio of an existing masonry building in the Vieux Carré. This method of adding space to a building predominantly occurs between Bourbon Street and the river where conversion of a commercial or warehouse building to residential use is common. In considering a proposed rooftop addition, the VCC considers the historic integrity of the original structure and surrounding area. It is equally important that an addition, when appropriate and allowed, contribute to the character of the area and respect the design and context of the building and its streetscape.

When reviewing a proposal for a rooftop addition, the VCC evaluates the application on a case by case basis. An approved rooftop addition at one location should not be considered a precedent or construed to mean that a similar proposal for another property will be approved. Factors considered by the VCC in its review include:

- The significance of the building or site as defined by its color rating
- The location of the building and site
- The height of the existing building, the proposed addition and surrounding buildings – It must also meet zoning requirements including height and setback
- The visibility of the proposed addition
- The architectural treatment of the proposed addition and its compatibility with the existing building – it should not be obtrusive or detract from the architecture of the existing building or the surrounding Vieux Carré Historic District, streetscape or adjacent buildings.

ROOFTOP ELEMENTS

The VCC has jurisdiction over roof-mounted equipment and rooftop decks, including paving and semi-permanent furnishings. (Refer to *Roof Mounted Equipment, Guidelines for Roofing*, page 04-11, and *Outdoor Furnishings, Guidelines for Site Elements & Courtyards*, page 10-9.)



A camelback addition typically is found on a wood-framed shotgun single or double.

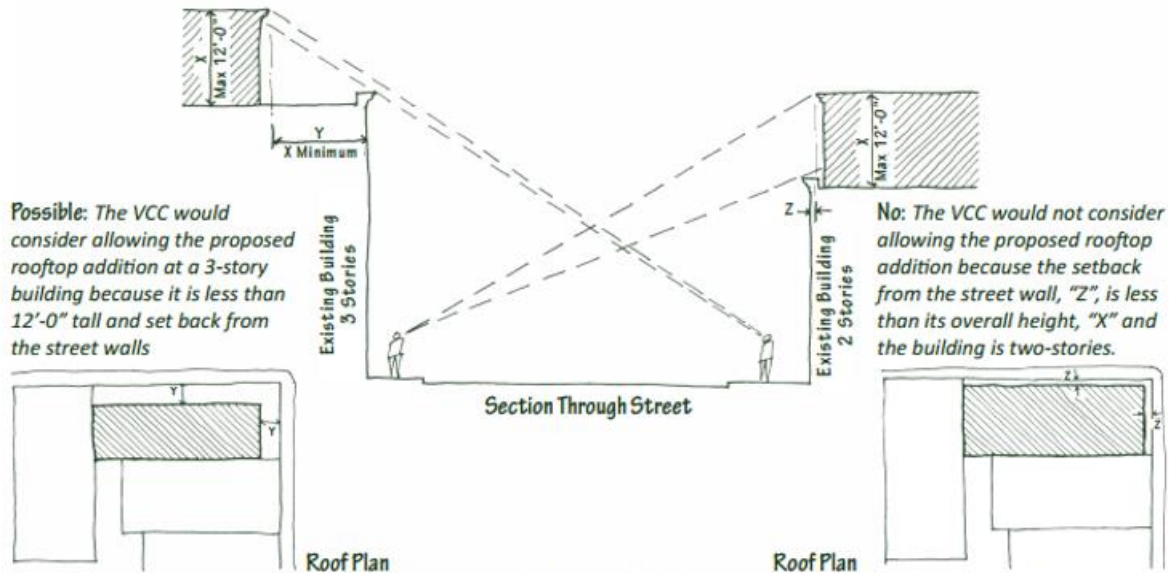


This rooftop addition is set back from the building corner on both sides and has a flat roof without permanent projecting overhangs. The metal railing is nominally visible to pedestrians.

ROOFTOP ADDITIONS SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the submission requirements identified in the *New Construction & Addition Review* (page 14-2), the following information is required for each application for a rooftop addition:

- Dimensioned elevations and plans showing the proposed rooftop addition on the existing building
- Sight-line studies, either photographs or drawings, illustrating the massing of the proposed addition and visibility in all directions, and showing not only the impact on the subject building, but also on the adjacent buildings and the Vieux Carré as a whole
- A scaled massing model of the addition on the existing building that includes adjacent buildings
- A section through the building to the boundary of the property on the other side of the street



A rooftop addition must be set back from the street walls of the existing building by a minimum of the proposed height of the addition, (i.e. 12'-0" high rooftop addition must be set back from the street wall a minimum of 12'-0".) The VCC discourages a rooftop addition on a building less than three full stories in height because of the increased likelihood of visibility.

DESIGN STANDARDS FOR ROOFTOP ADDITION REVIEW

If allowable by the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) and appropriate at a particular site, the VCC uses specific design standards to review a rooftop addition proposal. In its review of a proposed rooftop amenity or addition, the VCC:

- Strives to make a rooftop addition, including an elevator and mechanical equipment, as well as furnishings as unobtrusive and minimally visible as possible
- Limits the overall height of a rooftop addition, including framing and parapet, to 12'-0" above the lowest surface of the existing roof, except for code-required components, such as an elevator override
- Requires that a rooftop addition be set back from the street façade(s) of the building by a minimum of the overall height of the proposed addition (i.e., a 12'-0" high rooftop addition should be set back from the street wall a minimum of 12'-0")
- Requires that a rooftop addition incorporate elevator, mechanical and HVAC equipment within the single story and allowable addition footprint
- Requires that all furnishings including railings, screens, planters, plants and permanent rooftop furnishings taller than the closest parapet be setback from the street wall(s) a minimum of the height of the proposed furnishing from the lowest roof surface
- Considers a proposal for a rooftop addition that does not conform to these *Guidelines* at a Green, Pink or Yellow rated building under limited circumstances; however, excellence in design and the architectural character of the existing building are strong factors in the review

Rooftop Addition Review

Construct a rooftop addition

1 2 3

Commission

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